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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to construct a profile of the characteristics of the 684 Louisiana public school board members serving in 1976 and to report on their opinions on selected education topics. A total of 341 board members responded to the instrument constructed and mailed by the researchers. Among the results is the finding that the typical Louisiana public school board member is male, white, approximately 47 years of age, married, and a father of children who are enrolled in public schools. He has never been employed in an education-related position, has attended college, and earns about $20,000. He tends to be conservative on education related issues, favoring corporal punishment in school and compulsory school attendance, and not favoring teacher collective bargaining or the current Louisiana teacher tenure law. Tables depicting selected opinions by sex, ethnicity, age, education, income, and number of years of service are included. Other profile data and opinions are appended. (Author/JM)

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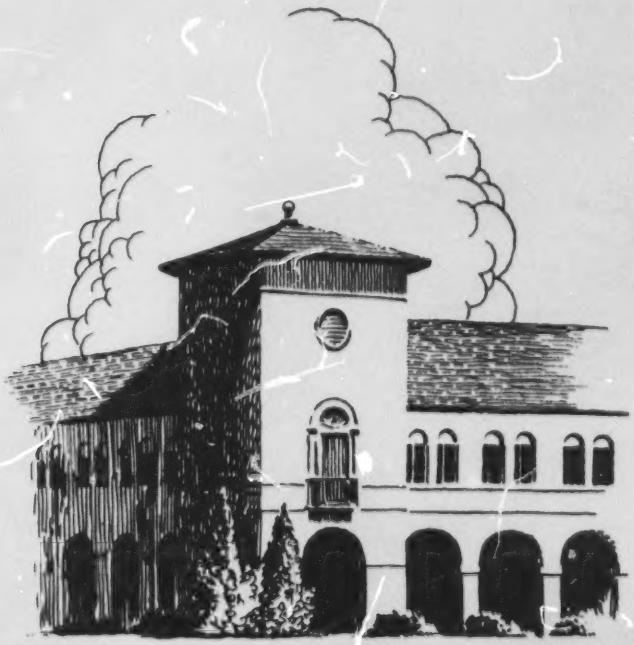

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LOUISIANA PARISH SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS, 1977: PROFILE AND OPINIONS ON SELECTED TOPICS

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LOUISIANA PARISH SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS, 1977: PROFILE AND OPINIONS ON SELECTED TOPICS

by

C. Robert Blackmon and Sue C. Jones

The public school involves the average American over a greater span of his lifetime than any other single institution (2:17). Approximately 100,000 board members in 17,000 public school districts (6:122) administer educational programs delivered to 45,000,000 students by 2,500,000 teachers at a cost of billions of dollars annually (3:8).

Despite the magnitude of the enterprise they control, surprisingly little research has been done on the characteristics and opinions of American public school board members. Nearing (11) did an important study in 1917, and Struble (13) reported his study in 1922. Perhaps the most seminal work was that conducted by Counts (4) during 1920-26. The National Education Association (10) made a status study of the organization and practices of school boards in 1948, and White (14) published a similar report for the U.S. Office of Education in 1962. Gross (8) offered a less statistical and more sociological approach to the role of the board in 1958. Goldhammer's The School Board (7) summarized in 1964 the previous research and offered a base line for comparison with Counts' study. Finally, Brodinsky (3) gave brief but important data as of 1976.

Even though Brodinsky (3:7-8) suggests more change than other sources, fifty years of data on American public school board members reveal relatively little change in their characteristics or attitudes. While the percentage of minority group board members and the number of female members have increased

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slightly, those data do not reflect the radical changes in our society. However, there are now some minority or female members on boards where there were none before. Also, the urbanization of the U.S. seems to have contributed to a reduction in the number of board members engaged in agriculture or agricultural services.

The typical American public school board member today is basically male, Caucasian, professional-managerial-proprietary in occupation, college-educated, economically-elite, and politically and philosophically conservative. Bendiner (2:15) warns that the traditional structure and support of public education cannot meet our needs today and infers that the school board may become a political casualty.

A number of narrowly-focused dissertation studies of the school board members in states other than Louisiana were identified. (1,5) However, a search of the literature revealed only two studies of the characteristics or attitudes of Louisiana public school board members. Hunter (9) made a study in 1949, and Southern (12) did a similar study in 1968.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to gather data for the construction of a profile of the characteristics of the 684 Louisiana public school board members of 1976 and a report on their opinions on selected education topics.

PROCEDURES

Following a review of the literature and with the cooperation of the Louisiana School Boards Association (LSBA), a survey instrument was constructed and mailed to Louisiana's 684 public school board members. Approximately the format of that instrument was used in this report as a vehicle for reporting the results of that survey. The variety of responses to each of the

open-ended items was reduced to a few general categories for brevity and simplicity in reporting. (See pages 12-16.) The responses to the opinion items on corporal punishment, compulsory school attendance, teacher tenure, and collective bargaining were examined in terms of a pro-or-con dichotomy by sex, ethnicity, age, level of education, income level, and number of years of school board service. (See Tables 1-4.) The responses to the item on teacher salaries

Table 1

Responses of Members (in percentages):
"Should corporal punishment be permitted?"

		Yes		No	
		%	N	%	N
Sex:	Male	94	278	6	19
	Female	87	27	13	4
Ethnicity:	Black	88	23	12	3
	Caucasian	93	280	7	20
Age:	18-30	100	15	0	0
	31-40	90	52	10	6
	41-50	96	108	4	4
	51-60	91	83	9	8
	61+	92	48	8	4
Level of Ed.:	10-12	96	79	4	3
	1-3 college	96	79	4	3
	bachelor's	92	79	8	7
	beyond bach.	88	61	12	8
Income Level:	-$5,000	93	14	7	1
	$5001-10,000	95	18	5	1
	10,001-15,000	94	46	6	3
	15,001-20,000	98	65	2	1
	20,001-25,000	93	51	7	4
	25,001-30,000	92	33	8	3
	+$30,000	88	73	12	10
Number of Years of School Board Service	-7	94	194	6	12
	7-12	89	51	11	6
	13-18	92	36	8	3
	19-24	90	18	10	2
	25+	100	5	0	0

Table 2

Responses of Members (in percentages):
"Should the compulsory attendance statute (7 through 15) be changed?"

		Yes		No	
		%	N	%	N
Sex:	Male	22	64	78	224
	Female	29	9	71	22
Ethnicity:	Black	19	5	81	21
	Caucasian	24	69	76	222
Age:	18-30	0	0	100	15
	31-40	33	19	67	38
	41-50	24	26	76	82
	51-60	22	19	78	69
	61+	20	10	80	41
Level of Ed.:	10-12	20	16	80	65
	1-3 college	21	17	79	63
	bachelor's	25	20	75	61
	beyond bach.	31	21	69	47
Income Level:	-$5,000	29	4	71	10
	$5001-10,000	15	3	85	17
	10,001-15,000	19	9	81	38
	15,001-20,000	19	12	81	52
	20,001-25,000	24	12	76	39
	25,001-30,000	32	12	68	25
	+$30,000	25	20	75	61
Number of Years of School Board Service	-7	26	52	74	150
	7-12	22	12	78	42
	13-18	24	9	76	28
	19-24	5	1	95	19
	25+	0	0	100	5

Table 3

Responses of Members (in percentages):
"Is the current teacher tenure law satisfactory?"

		Yes		No	
		%	N	%	N
Sex:	Male	33	98	67	195
	Female	58	18	42	13
Ethnicity:	Black	92	24	8	2
	Caucasian	31	92	69	205
Age:	18-30	40	6	60	9
	31-40	29	17	71	42
	41-50	31	34	69	74
	51-60	35	32	65	59
	61+	55	28	45	23
Level of Ed.:	10-12	45	38	55	47
	1-3 college	36	28	64	49
	bachelor's	24	21	76	65
	beyond bach.	38	26	62	42
Income Level:	-$5,000	71	10	29	4
	$5001-10,000	57	12	43	9
	10,001-15,000	51	25	49	24
	15,001-20,000	42	27	58	37
	20,001-25,000	30	16	70	38
	25,001-30,000	33	12	67	24
	+$30,000	14	12	85	70
Number of Years of School Board Service	-7	39	81	61	125
	7-12	30	16	70	37
	13-18	32	13	68	27
	19-24	21	4	79	15
	25+	60	3	40	2

Table 4

Responses of Members (in percentages):
"Should teachers be represented by a collective bargaining agent?"

		Yes		No	
		%	N	%	N
Sex:	Male	24	69	76	217
	Female	42	13	58	18
Ethnicity:	Black	39	9	61	14
	Caucasian	25	73	75	219
Age:	18-30	31	4	69	9
	31-40	31	18	69	40
	41-50	23	25	77	82
	51-60	21	19	79	71
	61+	32	16	68	34
Level of Ed.:	10-12	32	26	68	56
	1-3 college	28	22	72	56
	bachelor's	23	19	77	63
	beyond bach.	20	13	80	53
Income Level:	-$5,000	69	9	31	4
	$5001-10,000	16	3	84	16
	10,001-15,000	30	14	70	32
	15,001-20,000	23	15	77	50
	20,001-25,000	27	14	73	38
	25,001-30,000	22	8	78	28
	+$30,000	20	16	80	65
Number of Years of School Board Service	-7	28	54	72	142
	7-12	32	18	68	38
	13-18	10	4	90	35
	19-24	20	4	80	16
	25+	20	1	80	4

were examined in terms of high, adequate, or low by sex, ethnicity, age, level of education, income level, and number of years of school board service. (See Table 5.) The responses to the item on the type of elementary or secondary

Table 5

Responses of Members (in percentages):
"How do you view teacher salaries in your parish?"

		High		Adq.		Low	
		%	N	%	N	%	N
Sex:	Male	6	18	40	120	53	160
	Female	0	0	33	11	67	22
Ethnicity:	Black	4	1	19	5	78	21
	Caucasian	6	17	41	125	53	161
Age:	18-30	0	0	47	7	47	7
	31-40	8	5	44	27	48	29
	41-50	8	9	38	42	54	61
	51-60	4	4	42	39	53	49
	61+	0	0	30	16	68	36
Level of Ed.:	10-12	3	3	48	41	47	40
	1-3 college	6	5	41	34	53	44
	bachelor's	5	4	40	34	56	48
	beyond bach.	9	6	28	19	64	44
Income Level:	-$5,000	0	0	33	5	67	10
	$5001-10,000	5	1	38	8	52	11
	10,001-15,000	4	2	40	20	56	28
	15,001-20,000	7	5	42	28	51	34
	20,001-25,000	5	3	40	22	55	30
	25,001-30,000	3	1	46	17	51	19
	+$30,000	7	6	36	30	57	47
Number of Years of School Board Service	-7	6	13	39	82	54	114
	7-12	7	4	39	22	54	31
	13-18	0	0	45	18	53	21
	19-24	0	0	30	6	70	14
	25+	0	0	40	2	60	3

school attended by the children of board members were examined in terms of type of school attended (public, private, or parochial) and by the board members' sex, ethnicity, age, level of education, income level, and number of years of school board service. (See Table 6.)

Table 6

Responses of Members (in percentages):
"In what type of elementary or secondary school are your children enrolled?"

		Public		Private		Parochial	
		%	N	%	N	%	N
Sex:	Male	76	129	7	12	12	20
	Female	80	12	0	0	13	2
Ethnicity:	Black	69	11	0	0	19	3
	Caucasian	78	131	7	12	10	17
Age:	18-30	78	7	0	0	22	2
	31-40	76	38	10	5	10	5
	41-50	78	68	6	5	10	9
	51-60	75	24	6	2	13	4
	61+	57	4	0	0	29	2
Level of Ed.:	10-12	78	35	13	6	4	2
	1-3 college	70	32	9	4	13	6
	bachelor's	87	47	0	0	13	7
	beyond bach.	69	25	6	2	17	6
Income Level:	-$5,000	100	5	0	0	0	0
	$5001-10,000	67	6	11	1	22	2
	10,001-15,000	85	22	4	1	8	2
	15,001-20,000	66	23	11	4	14	5
	20,001-25,000	85	28	3	1	9	3
	25,001-30,000	61	14	4	1	30	7
	+$30,000	80	40	8	4	6	3
Number of Years of School Board Service	-7	77	101	6	8	13	17
	7-12	79	23	14	4	7	2
	13-18	71	12	0	0	12	2
	19-24	100	6	0	0	0	0
	25+	0	0	0	0	100	1

PROFILE AND OPINIONS

The following profile is based on the responses of 341 (49.9%) of the 684 members on Louisiana's public school boards. Returns were received from 65 of the 66 systems. There was little variation in the percent of returns from

board members in terms of system size. The range of members per board was 5-19, the mean 10.36, and the median 11.74. Parish public school board members are allocated in Louisiana on the basis of one member for each police juror ward, with some variation resulting from specific constitutional, statutory, or judicial revisions.

Taken in composite form, the data from this survey indicate that the Louisiana public school board member is male, white, approximately 47 years of age, married, and has children who are enrolled in public schools. He has not been employed other than as a board member in an education-related position, has attended college (71%) and has earned a bachelor's or higher degree (46%), earns approximately $20,000 a year (although 83 or 25% earn more than $30,000). His daily work in his current employment is closely related to the subject area in which he specialized in college.

He has served on the school board less than seven years. He spends six to eight hours a month on activities related to board business, primarily in talking with constituents. He contacts his Louisiana legislators from one to nine times a year, with a mode of contact of one to two times a year. While he is devoting most of his board activity to policy making, he feels that he should be devoting even more effort toward policy making and less to actual administration.

His sources of information are primarily the local board staff, the Louisiana School Boards Association, the Louisiana State Department of Education, and school board colleagues, in that order of frequency. He views the working relationship between the board and the superintendent as good usually, and he believes that the best length of term of office for a superintendent is four years.

The typical Louisiana public school board member tends to be conservative in his views on selected education-related issues. He strongly favors the permitting of corporal punishment in schools. He approves of the current compulsory school attendance statute (7 through 15 years of age). He feels that the current teacher tenure law is unsatisfactory. He feels that teachers should not be represented by a collective bargaining agent and even more strongly that non-certificated school employees should not be so represented.

The teacher tenure law was the item that received the most differences in opinion among the various groups. (See Table 3.) In response to the question "Is the Louisiana teacher tenure law satisfactory?" 67% of the males said no, and 58% of the females said yes. Caucasians answered no (69%), while blacks said yes (92%). Board members between the ages of 31 and 40 said no (71%); those over 61 said yes (55%). Those with a bachelor's degree answered no (76%), but those with only 10-12 years of schooling said yes (45%). Of those with incomes in excess of $30,000, 85% said no, and 71% of those with incomes under $5,000 said yes. Members with 19-24 years of service replied no (79%), while those with more than 25 years said yes (60%). On other items examined the board members were in closer agreement.

The responses of board members with the largest student population enrollments within seven metropolitan areas of the state, made up of eleven public school systems, were compared with the responses of members of the eleven smallest systems in terms of items concerning corporal punishment, teacher tenure, collective bargaining for teachers, and teacher salaries. (See Table 7). The widest difference of opinion between the two groups concerned the degree of satisfaction of board members with the teacher tenure law. While 63% of the board members from the large systems found the tenure law unsatisfactory, 51% of the board members from the small systems felt it was satisfactory. However, a chi-

square test revealed that that difference on the tenure law was not statistically significant.

The typical board member felt that teacher salaries were low. (NOTE: This opinion was taken while a state-wide campaign to raise teachers' salaries was in progress and prior to a recent legislative, across-the-board raise of $1500.)

Table 7

Responses of Members on Selected Questions

1. Should corporal punishment be permitted?
2. Is the current teacher tenure law satisfactory?
3. Should teachers be represented by a collective bargaining agent?
4. How do you view teacher salaries in your parish?

		1		2		3		4		
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	High	Adequate	Low
Large	%	86	14	37	63	29	71	7	36	57
Systems[a]	#	60	10	25	43	19	47	5	25	40
Small	%	94	6	51	49	28	72	3	47	50
Systems[b]	#	34	2	18	17	10	26	1	17	18

[a] Large systems: N=109, R=70, % responding=64

[b] Small systems: N=89, R=36, % responding=40

LOUISIANA PARISH SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER, 1977:

PROFILE DATA AND OPINIONS ON SELECTED TOPICS

(N=341 NR=No Response R=Responded)

1. Sex (R=339): 306 male (90.3%) 33 female (9.7%) 2 NR (0.6%N)

2. Ethnic Origin (R=336): 28 Afro-American/Black (8.3%)
308 Caucasian American/White (91.7%)
5 NR (1.5%N)

3. Age (R=339): 16 18-30 (4.7%)
61 31-40 (18.0%)
115 41-50 (33.9%)
93 51-60 (27.4%)
54 61 or more (15.9%)
2 NR (0.6%N)
Mean = 47.5

4. Marital status (R=339): 324 Yes (96.8%)
11 No (3.2%)
2 NR (0.6%N)

5. Do you have children? (R=340)
324 Yes (95.3%) 16 No (4.7%) 1 NR (0.3%N)

6. Highest year or degree of education completed (R=338)?

3 0-3 (0.9%)
2 4-6 (0.6%)
3 7-9 (0.9%)
89 10-12 (26.3%)

83 1-3 Years of College (24.6%)
87 Bachelor's Degree (25.7%)
71 Beyond Bachelor's (20.8%)
3 NR (0.9%N)

Beyond Bachelor's: (Specify)

Below Master's:	11	Beyond Master's:	24
Masters:	17	Doctorate:	28

7. Have children enrolled in an elementary or high school? (R=333)
186 Yes (55.9%) 147 No (44.1%) 8 NR (2.3%N)
If YES, specify:
142 Public (76.3%) 12 Private (6.4%)
22 Parochial (11.8%) 10 NR (5.4%)

8. (If you attended college) Is most of your daily work in your current employment closely related to the subject area in which you specialized in college? (R=251)

132 Yes (52.6%) 119 No (47.4%) 90 NR (26.4%N)

If YES: Please name subject area:

Agriculture-related	17	Science and Medical-related:	24
Business	38	Misc.	7
Education	22	NR	17
Law	7		

9. Approximate total income annually: (R=334)

15 less than $5000 (4.5%)	21 $5,001-10,000 (6.3%)
50 $10,001-15,000 (15.0%)	67 $15,001-20,000 (20.1%)
58 $20,001-25,000 (17.4%)	40 $25,001-30,000 (12.0%)
83 more than $30,001 (24.9%)	NR= 7 (2.1%N)

Median $21,200
Mean ($5,001 through $30,000)= $18,474

10. Number of years of service as a school board member: (R=338)

212 less than 7 (62.2%)	58 7 through 12 (17.2%)
42 13 through 18 (12.4%)	21 19 through 24 (6.2%)
5 More than 25 (1.5%)	3 NR (.9%N)

Mean = 7.6 years

11. Hours per month spent as a board member: (R=341)

6.5 visiting schools	6.3 board committee meetings
12.7 talking with constituents	6.4 board meetings
Range = 1-60 hours	Median = 5.2 hours
10.6 other (describe)	Mean = 7.9 hours

The other hours were spent as follows:

Attending school functions:	9	Meeting with other elected officials:	7
Meeting with employees:	14	Other board duties:	22
Meeting with organizations:	17	Writing newspaper articles:	3

12. What do you believe that you SHOULD BE DOING as a board member? (R=339)

4 administration (2.1%)	261 policy making (77.0%)
66 both policy making and administration (19.5%)	
8 other (explain) (2.4%)	8 NR (2.3%N)

Board members listed these other duties with the following frequency:

Evaluation:	3	Representing constituents:	4
Follow-up policy decisions:	6	Watching finances:	4
Observation and inspection:	2	Misc.:	4
Public relations:	10		

13. What do you see yourself as ACTUALLY DOING as a board member? (R=333)

7	administration (2.1%)	203	policy making (61.0%)
113	both policy making and administration (33.9%)		
10	other (explain) (3.0%)	8	NR (2.3%N)

The other duties mentioned:

Liaison between adm., educators, and public:	20	Public Relations:	15
Making final decision:	7	Supervision:	7
Making positive changes:	3	Misc. board duties:	3
		NR:	1

14. Source from which you gain the MOST information?
(R=341) On basis of rank by weighted responses:

Rank 1 (most important) -- local board staff (Wt.=268)*
Rank 2 -- Louisiana School Boards Assn. (Wt.=200)
Rank 3 -- La. State Department of Education (Wt.=161)
Rank 4 -- Other board members (Wt.=152)
Rank 5 -- Southern Region School Boards Assn. (Wt.=57)
Rank 6 -- Other sources (Explain.) (Wt.=30)
Rank 7 -- State Bd. of El. & Sec. Education (Wt.=27)
Rank 8 -- Nat. School Boards Assn. (wt.=20)
*264 (99.2%) named this one as first choice.

Other sources and frequency of mention:

Employees:	11	Personal research and experience:	9
Other elected officials:	4	Publications:	8
Parents and students:	16		

15. Working relationship of board and superintendent? (R=335)

248	usually good (74%)	69	varies (20.6%)
18	usually poor (5.4%)	6	NR (1.8%N)

16. Recommended term of office for superintendent? (R=334)

68	less than 4 years (20.4%)	231	four years (69.2%)
35	more than 4 years (10.5%)	7	NR (2.1%N)

17. Times board member contacted Louisiana legislators during past year? (R=331)

54	not at all (16.3%)	124	1 or 2 (37.5%)	10	NR (2.9%N)
127	3 to 9 (38.4%)	26	10 or more (7.9%)		

18. Have you ever been employed, other than as a board member, in a position in education? (R=331)

89	yes (26.9%)	242	No (73.1%)	10	NR (2.9%N)

If YES, describe position:

College-level teacher:	11	Teacher (elem. or sec.):	49
Education-related:	3	Vocational instructor:	3
Parish administration:	16	NR:	4
State administration:	2		

Type of school or system where position was held:

55	public (61.8% of 89)	7	non-public (7.9% of 89)

19. Should corporal punishment be permitted in schools? (R=329)
306 Yes (93.0%) 23 no (7.0%) 12 NR (3.5%N)

20. Should Louisiana's compulsory school attendance statute (7 through 15 years of age) be changed? (R=320)
74 Yes (23.1%) 246 No (76.9%) 21 NR (6.2%N)

If YES, which change(s) would you approve?
16 eliminate compulsory education statute (5.0%)
34 admission to elem. school earlier than 7 (10.6%)
22 earlier legal dropout age (6.5%)
28 later legal droupout age (8.6%)
21 early dropout age by diploma equivalent through testing (6.6%)
9 other (Explain) (2.8%)
Allow students to attend alternative schools: 4
Place students in jobs instead of school: 1
Special provision for retarded or handicapped: 1
NR: 3

21. Is the current teacher tenure law satisfactory? (R=325)
117 Yes (36.0%) 208 No (64.0%) 16 NR (4.7%N)

If NO, state your objections.
NR: 30
Good teachers don't need a tenure law: 9
Grounds for dismissal need to be defined and enlarged: 20
Method of acquiring tenure needs change: 18
No provision for accountability: 13
Teachers take advantage of it: 30
There should be no tenure laws: 9
Too difficult to fire incompetent teachers: 81

22. Should teachers be represented by a collective bargaining agent? (R=318)
82 Yes (25.8%) 236 No (74.2%) 23 NR (6.7%N)

If YES, which?
63 La. Teachers Assn./La. Ed. Assn. (19.4%)
21 Assn. of Classroom Teachers (6.5%)
7 Am. Federation of Teachers (2.2%)
6 Other (1.8%) (Explain.) AFL-CIO: 1
Local school board: 1
Local teacher groups: 4

23. Should school employees, other than teachers be represented by a collective baragining agent? (R=315)
45 Yes (14.3%) 270 No (85.7%) 26 NR (4.4%N)

24. How do you view teacher salaries in your parish? (R=332)
18 high (5.4%) 131 adequate (39.2%) 183 low (54.8%) 9 NR (2.6%N)

25. Job or position from which board member currently receives his major income: (R=316) Multiple Responses

NR:	25	Professional:	138
Agricultural-related:	46	Retirement:	34
Board member:	1	Sales:	46
Homemaker:	5	Skilled labor:	64

26. The major GOAL of public education in Louisiana is: (R=305) Multiple Responses

NR:	36
To allow each student to develop to his or her full potential:	94
To improve our educational system:	70
To prepare young people to make a living and meet the challenge of society:	62
To teach more basic education:	70
Misc.:	28

The major PROBLEM in public education in Louisiana is: (R=303) Multiple Responses

NR:	38
Administrative leadership:	7
Apathy from parents, students, and teachers:	60
Discipline:	60
Excessive bureaucracy and politics at all levels:	86
Inadequate finances:	71
Integration:	16
Lack of basics; too many frills:	48
Low teachers' salaries:	16
Quality of teachers and teacher training programs:	36
Too much teacher power:	7

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